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One-Act Wonder



Play Station: 'Eight Tens @ 8'--featuring an array of area playwrights, directors and actors--kicks off its run on Friday at Actors' Theatre.

Actors' Theatre welcomes the return of its most popular festival, 'Eight Tens @ 8'

By Karen Reardanz

TO THE THEATRICALY phobic patron of the arts, the shorter the play, the more palatable the production. This is not to short-change the recognition given to one-act plays, however; they, like their literary brother, the short story, are just as challenging to create as a three-hour-long rendering of, say, *Titanic: The Musical*. But the shorter play guarantees that if one dislikes one performance, another will be along in scant time.

On Friday, Actors' Theatre kicks off a five-week run of the Fourth Annual 10-Minute Play

Festival, affectionately titled "Eight Tens @ 8." This year's production features original plays scripted by Santa Cruz playwrights and, for the first time, theatrical scribes from the Central Coast and Silicon Valley.

"This year we opened [the production] up to all Central Coast writers," festival publicity coordinator Sam Patterson says, "through a Web site, our newsletter and word of mouth. So we've got playwrights from the Santa Cruz area, two from Monterey and even a couple from San Jose."

The call for writers spawned 53 responses, the most works submitted in the festival's short but impressive four-year history. An anonymous panel of judges sifted and read through the works, narrowing down the piles to plays by eight authors: Philip Pearce, David Sals, 75-year-old Anne F. Adams (whose *San Francisco Fever*, according to Patterson, is hotly anticipated), Ross Eric Gibson, Jeffrey Bray, R. Joy Bartlett, Linnet C. Harlan and Doug Brook.

This expansive array of area literary talent covers topics that range from the comic to the emotionally draining.

"There's [Bartlett's] *Two Doors Down*, directed by Karen Schamberg, which is a serious play ... basically about racial prejudice," Patterson explains. "It's heavy and direct."

"The plays are selected individually, so the subjects are not related," Patterson explains, "but Willa Marcus Chandler, the festival's artistic director, arranges the plays in a certain sequence, a logical one to evoke emotion or laughter."

"Eight Tens @ 8," now in its fourth year, is one of Actors' Theatre's most successful ventures, attracting audiences again and again.

"It's quite popular. People like short plays

instead of a full evening of theater," Patterson laughs. "If you don't like the first play, you know something else is coming up."

He adds, "The festival is the most attended production on the part of Actors' Theatre. People have been calling [to see when it begins] because they came last year and have been looking forward to it again."

Whether the festival plays are intense meditations on the state of today's society or lighter pieces on the state of office politics, they are all aimed at the Santa Cruz area community and the local audiences that attend the festival performances year after year.

"The playwrights are in their mid-20s to mid-70s," Patterson says. "What [the festival] is is a reflection of the community and community concerns. Our biggest goal is people think about their lives."

Eight Tens @ 8 opens Friday, Jan. 8, at 8pm and continues weekends through Feb. 7. The Jan. 9 performance is an actors benefit. See stage listings for dates and times. Tickets cost \$12/\$10. For more info, call 425-PLAY.

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